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Defense Report
AUSA

Congress Reorganizes the Military—But That's Only Half the Job

In the words of Representative Les Aspin, Chairman of the House Armed Services committee, the recently enacted military reorganization bill represents "probably the greatest sea change in the history of the American military since the Continental Congress created the Continental Army in 1775."

Other commentators, editorialists and military "reformers" have concluded that the reorganization legislation promises to solve all the complexities associated with leading and managing an armed force nearly five million strong. In fact, the reforms go only halfway because, while they might help improve our defenses by tightening the military's organization, they completely ignore the need for better organization and clearer lines of responsibility for the efficient management of national security within Congress itself.

Hope for improvement in the effectiveness of our armed forces can be gained from the reorganization bill's provisions strengthening the role of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, by making him the President's principal military advisor and giving him responsibility to ensure that the budgets of the military departments meet the priorities set by the various theater Commanders-in-Chief (CINCs). The current bill also strengthens the CINCs' authority over the military units assigned to their respective theaters: so much for that half of the equation.

This legislation's principal shortcoming was best enumerated by the most recently retired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Gen. John W. Vessey, Jr., when he said: "Whatever interservice rivalry there may be, it contributes far less to inefficiency in the Defense Department than does the maze of overlapping committee responsibilities, the plethora of unnecessary reports, the lack of program stability and the perennial delays in getting appropriations bills out on time—all attributable to Congress."

The only hope for real improvement in defense management must await the convening of the 100th Congress next January. Is it reasonable to expect that they might become familiar with Gen. Vessey's points before they tackle their awesome responsibilities of providing for our national security?

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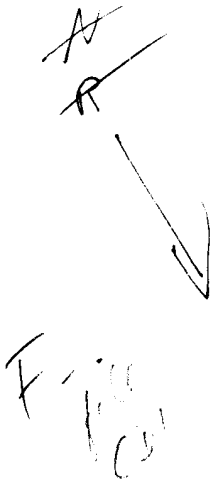

Defense Report
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Improving Conventional Deterrence—A Reasonable Prospect?

For a generation, the security of the United States has rested on its strategic nuclear capability as the key to deterrence. But conditions have changed considerably in the past decade.

First and foremost, the Soviet Union has achieved nuclear parity and, in doing, has built a massive nuclear arsenal. The potential for mutual destruction is a haunting reality, which leads us to seek other ways to guarantee security and deterrence.

As the relative reliance on nuclear weapons decreases between the United States and the Soviet Union, the weight of deterrence will shift increasingly to conventional forces with a greater dependence on landpower.

Sadly, however, U.S. conventional forces today are not prepared for this shift. Army modernization is only a little more than one-third complete, yet successful deterrence without resort to nuclear weapons requires our conventional forces to be significantly strengthened and modernized.

NATO is the keystone to our worldwide defense structure; but even the most cursory assessments show that NATO conventional forces today are not as well equipped as Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces and this situation is not improving. The fact remains that the Soviets continue modernizing at a faster pace than the U.S. or its allies and, consequently, are better organized and equipped to exploit their conventional superiority.

To counter the Warsaw Pact quantitative edge, Army planners have sought measures which would significantly enhance the effectiveness of our conventional forces. Their major conclusions were that, while much of the technology required for a conventional defense initiative already exists, the United States has been slow in taking advantage of it. These conventional force improvements are feasible today. They are seriously curtailed, however, by lack of funding.

The present reduction in our defense budget clouds the whole issue, but the future credibility of U.S. forces demands immediate attention. We simply cannot afford to let our conventional forces gradually slip to lower and lower relative levels vis-a-vis the Soviets. If we do, we will surely pay dearly.

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